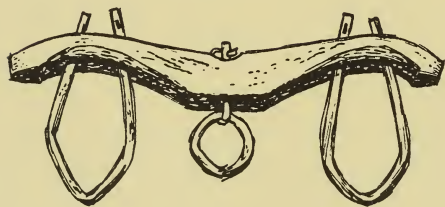


973.7L63 Starr, John William  
B4St28a

Abraham Lincoln's  
Religion: in his eldest  
son's estimation

# LINCOLN ROOM



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
LIBRARY  
MEMORIAL

the class of 1901

founded by  
HARLAN HOYT HORNER  
and  
HENRIETTA CALHOUN HORNER

*Abraham Lincoln's Religion*  
— in —  
*His Eldest Son's Estimation*

By John W. Starr, Jr.



50 Copies

Privately Printed

1926

# *Abraham Lincoln's Religion in His Eldest Son's Estimation*

By John W. Starr, Jr.

---

The recent death of Hon. Robert T. Lincoln has caused the mind of the present writer to revert back to a period of almost two decades ago on account of an incident which left its impress at that time.

As a student of the life of Abraham Lincoln I have always been particularly interested in his religious opinions and beliefs or disbeliefs. At the time of which I write I corresponded rather extensively with those of the Lincoln fraternity who might throw light upon this subject which has been debated ever since our First American ran for Congress in 1846. Those of his Springfield and Washington friends then living, including two of his law students and one of his secretaries, attaches of the White House during his administration, telegraphers of the War Department coming into daily contact with him and artists who painted his portrait; biographers and other writers; collectors and book dealers making a specialty of Lincolniana were addressed and this resulted in a file of about seventy-five communications setting forth the views of the writers at greater or lesser length and many and varied were the opinions expressed.

Among those prized most highly is a letter from Robert T. Lincoln, then connected with the Pullman Company of Chicago, in which it was stated that the views of his father's opinions on the subject which he considered most satisfactory were those given by Isaac N. Arnold in his biography of President Lincoln.

He further stated that this was for my private information and not publication, as he had been careful to refrain from entering into any discussion about his father, or permitting himself to be quoted concerning him during the many years which had elapsed since his father's death, and of all the replies received this was the only one which enjoined secrecy.

973.7263  
B4 St28a

LINCOLN Room

However, it has occurred to me that now that Mr. Robert Lincoln is gone, this tacit understanding is removed and this information should be given publicity for the benefit of those interested in Abraham Lincoln.

Hon. Isaac N. Arnold, whom Miss Tarbell refers to as "one of the most distinguished members of the Chicago bar," was, in all probability one of the most intimate friends that Abraham Lincoln had, in-so-far as he permitted that intimacy to exist between him and another.

Judge Fish's bibliography of Lincolniana lists eight books and pamphlets from the pen of Arnold. He was also author of other literature dealing with the same subject.

During the Civil War, while a member of Congress from Illinois, Mr. Arnold began his compilation of "The History of Abraham Lincoln and the Overthrow of Slavery," a pretentious volume of over seven hundred pages published in 1866.

In 1881, as an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, he read in London a paper on Abraham Lincoln which has been issued in several different editions.

But the crowning achievement of his life was a "Life of Abraham Lincoln" first published in 1884, and it is to this work which Robert Lincoln referred. It should be remarked in passing that this is one of the comparatively few biographies of the past which has survived more than a contemporary interest, for it is still published, bearing testimony to an intrinsic worth, and I believe that the most expensive item in my collection of Lincolniana is an extra illustrated two-volume set bound in half morocco.

Hon. Elihu B. Washburne, another Illinois statesman, called the "Watch-dog of the Treasury" and "Father of the House," said in referring to the latter biography, that "Mr. Arnold has shown in his life of Mr. Lincoln that he has a full and just appreciation of the true province of history.

"Few had known Mr. Lincoln better than Mr. Arnold, and no man was more familiar with his life, or had studied more profoundly his personal and political character or his public career. They had been personal friends for a quarter of a century. They

were much together in the courts and often associated in the trial of causes, and had been opposing counsel in important litigation. Their long acquaintance and association had made them to know each other well, and had engendered mutual respect and mutual regard.

"From the time that Mr. Arnold entered Congress, at the breaking out of the War of the Rebellion, he became one of the most trusted advisers of Mr. Lincoln, and few men outside of the Cabinet were more frequently consulted by him in important matters. No one knew better Mr. Lincoln's thoughts and intentions than Mr. Arnold, and no one enjoyed his confidence to a higher degree. It may be truly said that no man was better qualified to write a serious and authoritative life of Mr. Lincoln, and to enlighten the public in respect to the character, career and services of that illustrious man."

Col. A. K. McClure has borne testimony to the fact that President Lincoln told him of all the Republican members of the House of Representatives there was but one member in whose personal and political friendship he had absolute faith, and that was Congressman Arnold; and Dr. Wm. E. Barton has narrated how upon one occasion when a visitor at Washington asked the eccentric Thaddeus Stevens to be introduced to some of the President's supporters, Stevens took him to Arnold's desk, saying that as the visitor wanted to meet the members of Congress who were in sympathy with Abraham Lincoln, so far as he knew Arnold was the only man in the lower House who belonged in that group.

In 1864 when the proposed amendment to the Constitution abolishing and prohibiting slavery was being agitated in Congress, Dr. Barton says that during the debate "it is probable that no one in the House of Representatives stood closer to Lincoln than Honorable Isaac N. Arnold, of Illinois."

Lincoln's own secretaries, Nicolay and Hay, refer to Arnold as "an intimate and valued friend of the President," and while in 1864 Lincoln pursued a "hands-off" policy towards the various Congressional aspirants, he did take cognizance of the antagonism existing between Arnold and Postmaster Scripps of Chicago, the latter being the author of the famous campaign biography of 1860 bearing his name, and a friend to whom he was greatly indebted



politically. He addressed a communication to Mr. Scripps stating that he was "well satisfied with Mr. Arnold as a member of Congress" and in addition wrote to Arnold that "I take it your devotion to the Union and the administration cannot be questioned by any sincere man." And it is worthy of note that the last remarks of President Lincoln as he stepped into the carriage to convey him to the theatre April 14th, 1865, were addressed to his old Illinois friend asking him to call on the morrow.

With this evidence before us, it seems conclusive that Mr. Arnold would be in a position to form a just estimate and that Abraham Lincoln's son in coinciding with the viewpoint of the Illinois attorney and Congressman has placed a double value upon it.

Just what has Mr. Arnold said on this question?

"It is very strange," he wrote in his summary of the character of the martyr President, "that any reader of Lincoln's speeches and writings should have the hardihood to charge him with a want of religious feeling.

"No more reverent Christian than he ever sat in the executive chair; not excepting Washington," he goes on, elaborating on his thesis.

"He was by nature religious; full of religious sentiment. The veil between him and the supernatural was very thin. It is not claimed that he was orthodox. For creeds and dogmas he cared little. But in the great fundamental principles of religion, of the Christian religion, he was a firm believer. Belief in the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, in the Bible as the revelation of God to man, in the efficacy and duty of prayer, in reverence towards the Almighty, and in love and charity to man, was the basis of his religion.

"From the time he left Springfield to his death he not only himself continually prayed for divine assistance, but constantly asked the prayers of his friends for himself and his country. Declarations of his trust in God and his belief in the efficacy of prayer pervade his state papers, letters and speeches. Pages of quotations showing this might be furnished. His reply to the

negroes of Baltimore when they, in 1864, presented him with a magnificent Bible, ought to silence forever those who charge him with unbelief. He said: 'In regard to the Great Book I have only to say, that it is the best gift which God has given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated through this book.'

"In a letter written January 12th, 1851, when his father was dangerously ill, he says: 'I sincerely hope father may yet recover his health, but at all events tell him to remember to call upon and confide in our great and good and merciful maker, who will not turn any from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our heads. He will not forget the dying man who puts his trust in Him. Say to him if it be his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous meeting with loved ones gone before, and where the rest of us, through the help of God, hope ere long to join him.'

"To a friend, who inquired why, with his marked religious character, he did not unite with some church organization, Lincoln replied: 'I have never united myself to any church, because I found difficulty in giving my assent, without mental reservation, to the long and complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterize their articles of belief and confessions of faith. When any church will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership, the Savior's condensed statement of the substance of both law and gospel: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself," that church shall I join with all my heart and soul.'

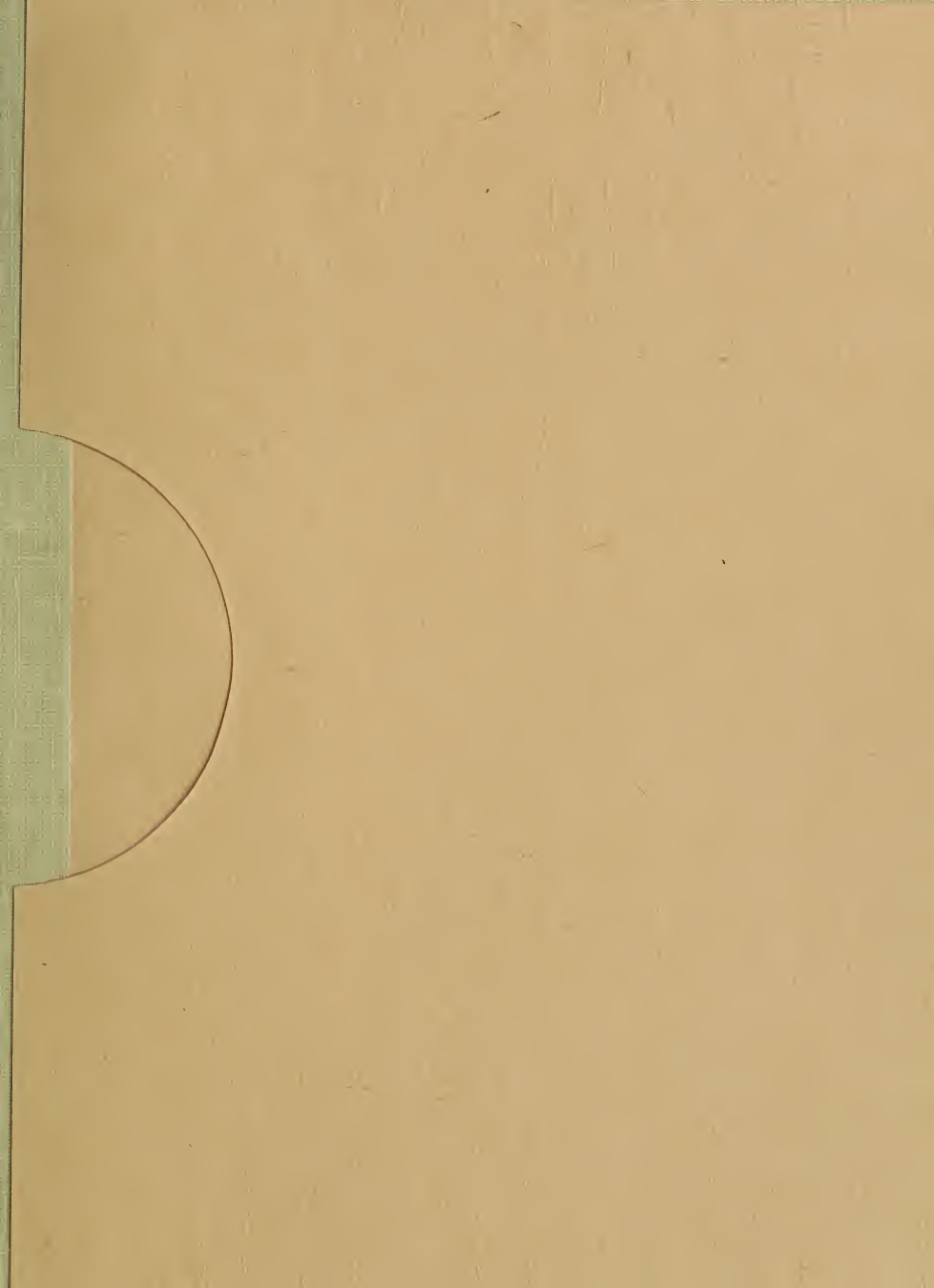
But it is not necessary to debate the subject. All his writings prove that he was a religious man, reverent, humble, prayerful, charitable, conscientious; otherwise his whole life was a sham, and he himself a hypocrite. Doubtless, like many others, he passed through periods of doubt and perplexity; but his faith in a divine Providence began at his mother's knee, and ran through all the changes of his life. Not orthodox, not a man of creeds, he was a man of simple trust in God, living in the consciousness of the presence of the great Creator, and one whose heart was ever open to the impressions of the unseen world.



“He was one whom no sectarian could claim as a partizan, yet one whom every true Christian could recognize as a brother. To the poor widow, five of whose sons had been killed in battle, and the sixth severely wounded, he said: ‘I pray our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement.’ These pages might be filled with quotations of a similar character, but surely this is not necessary.

“When the unbeliever shall convince the people that this man, whose life was straightforward, truthful, clear and honest, was a sham and a hypocrite, then, but not before, may he make the world doubt his Christianity.”





UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 002242383